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Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

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Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 53/16 of 29 October 1998.

II. Consultations between representatives of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and representation at meetings

2. On 1 October 1998 the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held their annual coordinating meeting at United Nations Headquarters to discuss the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, in particular those items of concern and interest to OIC. Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahima Fall represented the Secretary-General at that meeting and, as in previous years, senior members of the Department of Political Affairs participated in the meeting as observers. The meeting was chaired by Sheikh Hamad bin Jasm bin Jabr Al-Thani, the Foreign Minister of Qatar.

3. The coordinating meeting reviewed the international political situation, with specific attention to the Middle East and the question of Palestine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, the situation in Afghanistan, Somalia, the situation relating to Nagorny Karabakh, the consequences of the Iraqi occupation of and aggression against Kuwait and the situation pertaining to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Security Council resolutions 731 (1992) and 883 (1993). The issue of United Nations reform, including the expansion and reform of the Security Council, was also discussed. The meeting admitted Guyana as the fifty-sixth member State of OIC.

4. The Permanent Observer of OIC to the United Nations, Ambassador Mokhtar Lamani, and other senior members of the OIC observer mission participated actively in the first follow-up meeting, organized by the Department of Political Affairs, between the United Nations and regional organizations. This working-level meeting, which took place on 10 and 11 December 1998, was convened as a follow-up to the high-level gathering of regional organizations held at United Nations Headquarters on 28 and 29 July 1998. OIC had also participated in this high-level meeting, which dealt with cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations. The working-level meeting in December focused on conflict prevention.

5. Mr. Fall also represented the Secretary-General at the Organization's twenty-sixth session of foreign ministers, which was convened in Ouagadougou from 28 June to 1 July 1999.

6. During the period under review, the United Nations and OIC continued their consultations on political matters, especially those concerning ongoing peacemaking efforts, which have become a new and very important dimension in the cooperation between the United Nations and OIC. The secretaries-general of the two organizations had a number of bilateral meetings during the period. Among other things they discussed the situation in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Kosovo. Both organizations continue to hold regular consultations, in particular at the level of the Department of Political Affairs and the Permanent Observer Mission of OIC to the United Nations, on the conflict situations in Afghanistan, Somalia and Tajikistan. With regard to the conflict in Afghanistan, both organizations remained in very close contact and exchanged views on issues such as joint initiatives and missions and the peacemaking efforts by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi. As regards Tajikistan, OIC has remained a member of the Contact Group established as part of the implementation phase of the Tajik peace process.

III. Follow-up action on recommendations of the meetings between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, including cooperation in the field of economic and social development

7. Outlined below is a summary of contributions received for the present report from organizations of the United Nations system. It should be noted that a number of these contributions focus on programmes taking place in States members of OIC rather than on joint activities and/or programmes implemented in cooperation with institutions of OIC.

A. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

8. During the period from June 1998 to May 1999, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continued its cooperation with some of the specialized and affiliated institutions of OIC, namely the Islamic Development Bank, the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Cooperation between FAO and these institutions of OIC kept its focus on areas of common interest, such as food security and rural development, training in agricultural policy analysis, the trade in fish products, national capacity-building, promotion of agricultural production and protection of the environment and promotion of rural communities, with special attention to rural and Bedouin women. Furthermore, within the context of its follow-up to the World Food Summit of 1996, FAO has undertaken to prepare, in consultation with the OIC secretariat, a draft regional strategy for agriculture development and food security based on the "national strategies for agriculture development and food security horizon 2010", prepared for and in consultation with the OIC member countries. The Statistics Division provided assistance to several OIC countries in support of the development of their national agricultural statistics system. During the reporting period, FAO was invited to participate in the following important meetings organized by OIC: the general meeting of the United Nations and OIC secretariats (Geneva, 13-15 July 1998); the twenty-second session of the Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 23-26 January 1999), where FAO was represented by the programme coordinator in the country; and a meeting of the Secretary-General of OIC with the FAO Director-General (February 1999).

9. Project proposals were prepared for various funding sources with the assistance of the FAO Investment Centre Division and were subsequently approved for financing in OIC countries. Total investments mobilized in 18 projects were estimated at $769.51 million. Most of these projects aim at increasing agricultural production; improving irrigation, drainage management and water use; improving natural resources management; developing fisheries; developing and transferring improved technologies; and generating employment opportunities. The formulation of another 11 projects in OIC countries aiming at improving rural and livestock development, forestry and fisheries was completed for eventual consideration by financing institutions. Investment requirements for those projects are estimated at $181.55 million. FAO also helped formulate projects for the FAO Special Programme for Food Security in several OIC countries during the same period. Work was also carried out in some OIC African countries for the FAO/World Bank soil fertility initiative as well as for agricultural statistics.

B. International Fund for Agricultural Development

10. Since its inception, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has continued to accord due consideration to the promotion of cooperation with OIC member countries, which are both important contributors to the Fund's resources and recipients of IFAD assistance. As of December 1998, IFAD had financed 208 projects in 36 OIC member countries for a total project cost of $9.6 billion. The Fund's own contribution to those projects amounts to $2.6 billion, which represents about 40 per cent of total IFAD loans. External donors contributed $2.9 billion and recipient Governments $4 billion. The Islamic member countries play a key role in framing the Fund's policies and priorities. They have contributed a total of $828.1 million through the last three replenishments, or about 27 per cent of the total resource flow and a pledge of $52.5 million to the fourth replenishment, representing 13 per cent of total pledges. IFAD was represented at the general meeting of the United Nations and OIC in July 1998. The meeting, among other issues, focused on enhancing the mechanism of cooperation between the United Nations system and OIC and its institutions.

C. International Labour Organization

11. The cooperation between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and OIC, through its subsidiary organs and its specialized and affiliated institutions, was closely continued in the social, humanitarian and technical fields and in their bilateral search for solutions to global problems in the region. ILO maintained close working relations with pertinent regional and subregional specialized and affiliated institutions of OIC, such as the Islamic Development Bank. Considerable progress was made in enhancing cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank, in particular in identifying possible joint activities in the fields of vocational training and employment. Contacts were also made with the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, another affiliated organ of OIC, to organize a regional joint activity programme for the development of women entrepreneurship

skills. ILO continued to support the national development endeavours of the OIC member States through its technical assistance programme. Furthermore, the relations between ILO and the concerned OIC institutions were strengthened through the exchange of information on issues of mutual interest, including the promotion of employment, enhancement of the performance of the national economies in the region, poverty alleviation, social security, empowerment of women in rural areas, combating child labour, enhancement of vocational training, vocational rehabilitation and enhancement of occupational safety and health.

D. International Civil Aviation Organization

12. Through its technical cooperation programme, the International Civil Aviation Organization continues to assist States members of OIC in the enhancement of their civil aviation facilities and services, which are essential for their social and economic development.

E. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

13. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has continued its cooperation with OIC through its specialized agencies, notably the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture and the Islamic Development Bank. Regular exchange of information between UNESCO and OIC and its specialized agencies is maintained in different areas of education, science, culture and communication, in the framework of the programme of cooperation for 1998-1999, signed by UNESCO and ISESCO on 17 July 1998. UNESCO has pursued its cooperation with ISESCO in the field of basic education. Joint activities were undertaken in the areas of literacy, primary education and the education of girls and women. The ISESCO contributed to and participated in the Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education (Seoul, 26-30 April 1999). Cooperation has also continued with the Islamic Development Bank on different levels and, in this connection, UNESCO participated in a special task force on the universalization of literacy in Islamic countries. Following a visit by the President and the Vice-President of the Bank to UNESCO in November 1998, UNESCO is working closely with the Bank to launch major projects on literacy, bilingual education and the reform of Quranic schools in Chad, Mauritania and Niger.

14. ISESCO is a partner in the organization of the World Science Conference (Budapest, 26 June-1 July 1999) following the signing of a cooperation agreement in Paris by UNESCO and ISESCO on 11 December 1998. ISESCO has also agreed to be a major partner for the UNESCO project entitled "international exhibition on Islamic science and technology". UNESCO was represented at the Second Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers, organized jointly by OIC, ISESCO and the Government of Morocco (Rabat, 12-14 November 1998), convened specifically to discuss and adopt the implementation mechanism of the "cultural strategy for the Islamic world", adopted by OIC, ISESCO and their member States at the Islamic Summit held in Tehran in 1997. With regard to the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, cooperation between both organizations continues. UNESCO has been invited to be represented at the first international seminar on traditional carpets and kilims in the Muslim world: past, present and future prospects for developing this heritage with the continuous changes of the market, design, quality and applied techniques (Tunisia, October 1999).

F. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

15. On 5 July 1988, OIC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed an agreement of cooperation in order to increase coordination on humanitarian issues. Cooperation between UNHCR and OIC has included regular consultations on humanitarian issues of mutual interest, including the sharing of information and documentation on policies and activities carried out and/or developed by the two agencies. The agreement laid the ground for OIC participation as an observer in UNHCR Executive Committee meetings and for UNHCR participation in an observer capacity in OIC meetings. Since 1988, UNHCR and OIC have expanded their cooperation in priority areas relating to refugees and global humanitarian problems of common interest. Their staff have met regularly in Geneva and in Jeddah. Moreover, exchanges between UNHCR and OIC were further expanded in the context of the meetings between United Nations and OIC focal points, which took place in Geneva in September 1989. OIC expressed its support for the general orientation of UNHCR protection and assistance activities in the countries of concern to it, and indicated its willingness to assist UNHCR in enhancing cooperation with its member States.

16. With regard to UNHCR cooperation with the specialized institutions of OIC, concrete steps have been taken to implement the provisions of the agreement signed in May 1991 between UNHCR and ISESCO. The agreement provides for general and permanent cooperation, including exchange of expertise, regular meetings of a joint commission and mutual benefits in staff services. It is in this framework that two projects in Morocco and Yemen were to be co-funded by the institutions, and a project was developed by ISESCO to benefit refugees in Afghanistan and Somalia.

G. United Nations Industrial Development Organization

17. Activities implemented jointly by United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and OIC specialized institutions included the organization by the Federation of Consultants from Islamic Countries and the Islamic Development Bank of an international symposium on restructuring, privatization and build-operate-transfer projects in Istanbul, Turkey, on 23 and 24 May 1998. A follow-up meeting was held in cooperation with UNIDO, the Islamic Development Bank and the Federation of Consultants from Islamic Countries in Tehran in November 1998, and a training workshop on project appraisal methods using the Computer Model for Feasibility Analysis and Reporting (training seminar on project development cycle project preparation and appraisal) was organized by UNIDO for participants from the Islamic Development Bank. The meeting was held from 2 February to 3 March 1999 in Jeddah.

H. United Nations Population Fund

18. In accordance with its mandate, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has continued to provide technical assistance to most member States of OIC in which population programmes, including reproductive health programmes and activities to improve women's status, were funded. As a follow-up to the last general meeting between the United Nations and OIC in Geneva (13-15 July 1998), cooperation between UNFPA and OIC was strengthened by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on 2 October 1998 by Azeddine Laraki, Secretary-General of OIC, and Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of UNFPA. The Memorandum of Understanding specifies the broad areas of possible cooperation between the two organizations. As planned and discussed during the general meeting, UNFPA continued to cooperate with OIC through the funding of joint activities with ISESCO. Those activities covered the areas of population and reproductive health to advance the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action in the Muslim world. This was done through workshops, conferences, symposia, expert meetings and the printing and translation of relevant materials to clarify the position of Islam with regard to reproductive health and family planning.

19. The Director General of ISESCO participated in a major international conference, organized by UNFPA, for OIC member States. The topic of the conference was Islam and population. It took place in November 1998 in Niamey, and more than 80 Muslim leaders and scholars from 27 OIC member States in Africa, the Middle East and Asia participated. The conference succeeded in formulating several recommendations for the further implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, especially with regard to Islam and reproductive health, Islam and the status of women, and Islam and population and development.

20. UNFPA staff members met on several occasions with Ambassador Mokhtar Lamani, Permanent Observer of OIC at the United Nations, and with other staff members of OIC and its affiliates. During those meetings, various topics of mutual interest were discussed, among which were:

(a) The need for convening an intergovernmental conference at the ministerial level for OIC member States as a follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly on an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The objective of such a conference would be to adopt a programme of action for OIC member States to implement the recommendations and key actions adopted at the special session;

(b) The possibility of convening a workshop for the Central Asian republics in preparation for the 2000 round of population and housing censuses. The workshop will be organized by the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for the Islamic Countries, a subsidiary organ of OIC, with the technical support of UNFPA.

I. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

21. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to enjoy the support of OIC in its efforts to provide essential services and humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees. Cooperation between UNRWA and OIC is reinforced by meetings between representatives of the two organizations, including the Commissioner-General of UNRWA. The Agency has continued to deepen contacts with the OIC secretariat and with the Islamic Development Bank. A delegation of the Islamic Development Bank visited the West Bank in November 1998 to discuss the Agency's education programme and the possibility of Bank funding for UNRWA school infrastructure.

22. UNRWA has long-standing working relationships with a number of OIC member States, in particular the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, where the Agency has operations providing services to 2.2 million Palestine refugees. Those Governments, as well as the Governments of Egypt and Turkey, are members of the UNRWA Advisory Commission. UNRWA has a close working relationship with the Palestinian Authority in respect of services provided to the 1.3 million Palestine refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and with the Palestine Liberation Organization on matters pertaining to refugee issues.

23. UNRWA continues to benefit from the support of OIC member States to the Agency's regular budget and special assistance programmes. In 1998, 14 member States (Brunei, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates) and the Palestine Liberation Organization contributed approximately $5 million in cash and in kind to the Agency's regular budget. Since the relocation of the Agency's headquarters to the area of operations in July 1996, the Commissioner-General has paid official visits to a number of OIC member States in the Gulf region and South-East Asia, including Bahrain, Brunei, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

J. World Food Programme

24. The World Food Programme (WFP) participated in the general meeting on cooperation between representatives of the secretariats of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions (Geneva, 15-18 July 1998). At the meeting, the two sides welcomed the initiatives to promote cooperation between OIC and WFP on common strategic priority issues. OIC and WFP expressed mutual interest in considering ways and means to conclude a cooperation agreement, in line with agreements reached between OIC and a number of other specialized agencies. Cooperation between OIC and WFP was deemed most effective in the following priority areas: assistance to refugees; food security and agriculture; education and eradication of illiteracy; human resources development; and trade development through local food purchases. In line with General Assembly resolution 53/16, in particular paragraphs 9 and 10, WFP agreed to formalize ties with OIC through a Memorandum of Cooperation between WFP and OIC; to accredit one WFP executive staff member to OIC, namely, the Director of the WFP regional bureau for the Middle East and North African countries, based in Cairo and to hold high-level meetings in order to reinforce cooperation mechanisms in all matters of common interest.

K. World Health Organization

25. The World Health Organization (WHO) maintains a close relationship with the States members of OIC. On 4 May 1999, the WHO Director-General invited the ambassadors of OIC member States to the United Nations and specialized agencies in Geneva to come to WHO for a formal meeting with her in response to a proposal from the OIC secretariat. Reform in WHO and the major issues of the forthcoming World Health Assembly were discussed.

L. World Bank

26. Cooperation between the World Bank and OIC is increasingly enhanced through continued contacts between the Bank and the various OIC institutions. More specifically, the Bank has cooperated with OIC institutions in the following areas: exchange of information and documentation in general; participation in the last general coordination meeting in Geneva; provision of financial support to the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry towards the cost of organizing their fifth private sector meeting for the promotion of trade and joint venture investment; continued collaboration with the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade; and collaboration on cultural heritage preservation and other related areas.

M. Other organizations, programmes and departments of the United Nations system

27. A number of other organizations, programmes and departments of the United Nations system, including the International Telecommunication Union, the Universal Postal Union, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations University and the Department of Public Information, also conveyed information to the United Nations Secretariat on their programmes and activities in cooperation with OIC and its specialized institutions.